



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives

September 21, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

I write to express my frustration and disappointment with the United States execution of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, and particularly the State Department's failure to establish clear procedures, maintain effective channels of communication, and properly implement a policy for evacuating American citizens in Afghanistan, Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs), Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, and our Afghan allies. Accordingly, I request a briefing from the State Department on its strategy to protect American citizens, LPRs, SIV holders, and our Afghan allies from the Taliban and ISIS-K, and its strategy and timeline for evacuating these individuals who were left behind.

The United States efforts to evacuate American citizens, LPRs, SIV holders, and Afghan allies ahead of the withdrawal from Afghanistan have been abysmal. The Administration's announcement on April 14 that the United States would fully withdraw from Afghanistan by September 11 sparked confusion and panic for those in Afghanistan, particularly American citizens.<sup>1</sup> Since the announcement, my staff and I have been in constant contact with the State Department, Department of Defense, and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services for information on their strategy and policies to ensure my constituents, American citizens, LPRs, SIV holders, and our Afghan allies were evacuated before the withdrawal was complete. During this time, the State Department, Department of Defense, and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services failed to clearly articulate a coherent policy and process that Congressional offices and constituent caseworkers could use to effectively advocate on behalf of our constituents and guarantee that they and any other American citizen in Afghanistan would not be left behind.

On August 15, almost four months to the day after the Administration's announcement, the Taliban captured Kabul.<sup>2</sup> The Taliban's capture of Kabul resulted in a flood of American

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<sup>1</sup> Moon Cronk, Terri. "Biden Announces Full U.S. Troop Withdrawal From Afghanistan by Sept. 11" *U.S. Department of Defense*, April 14, 2021 (<https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2573268/biden-announces-full-us-troop-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-by-sept-11/>)

<sup>2</sup> Zucchino, David. "Kabul's Sudden Fall to Taliban Ends U.S. Era in Afghanistan" *New York Times*, August 15, 2021 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/15/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-surrender.html>)

citizens, LPRs, SIV holders, and Afghan allies contacting the State Department, Congressional representatives, and government entities for details and instructions on how to apply and be permitted evacuation through the U.S.-led evacuation at the Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA).

The following two weeks leading up to August 31 turned into a logistical and humanitarian nightmare for my constituents, American citizens in Afghanistan, and others trying to flee the country. A family of Afghan-American constituents from my district seeking to escape Afghanistan were reported to have left HKIA because “they felt it was becoming too dangerous, being stuck between the Taliban and military troops” and were later blocked from returning due to checkpoints established by the Taliban and the growing threat of violence in and around the airport.<sup>3</sup>

My office was contacted multiple times by dozens of Americans, LPRs, SIV holders, and Afghan allies, representing 124 people. Throughout this two-week period, those individuals, as well as my constituent caseworkers, were subject to ever-changing and unclear guidance from the State Department, Department of Defense, and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, underwhelming and incomplete briefings from department staff, contradictory information as to when and where it was safe to approach HKIA, and confusion over the United States day-to-day capabilities to fully complete its evacuation mission. My staff were in contact with multiple veterans that were seeking help evacuating their families and allied Afghan interpreters who had saved their lives. They worked with non-profit and non-governmental organizations trying to protect Afghan women and help them escape. My office was also contacted by Afghans who work at the University of New Hampshire that were seeking to flee the Taliban’s rule. As of writing, we still do not have an update on the safety of these individuals.

The work to evacuate our fellow Americans and those that were left behind remains far from finished. On August 31, President Biden told reporters there are 100-200 U.S. citizens who were left behind in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> It was reported on September 1 that a State Department official said in a private briefing to reporters that “the majority” of SIVs – potentially tens of thousands of Afghans – were left in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> And on September 13, during your testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, you confirmed that “about 100” American citizens remain in Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> The State Department’s announcement on August 30 that the U.S. Embassy will remain closed and that all U.S. diplomatic personnel have been evacuated raises serious concerns

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<sup>3</sup> Sexton, Adam. “Manchester family stuck in Afghanistan struggles to get back to airport” *WMUR9 ABC*, August 18, 2021 (<https://www.wmur.com/article/manchester-family-afghanistan-kabul-airport/37339747>)

<sup>4</sup> Mason, Jeff. “Biden says U.S. committed to safe passage for last 100-200 Americans left in Afghanistan” *Reuters*, August 31, 2021 (<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/biden-says-us-committed-safe-passage-last-100-200-americans-left-afghanistan-2021-08-31/>)

<sup>5</sup> Ward, Alexander. “‘Majority’ of Afghan SIVs left behind, State Dept. official estimates” *Politico*, September 1, 2021 (<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/09/01/afghanistan-sivs-left-behind-state-dept-508327>)

<sup>6</sup> Desiderio, Andrew. “Menendez skewers Austin no-show at Afghan testimony” *Politico*, September 14, 2021 (<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/09/14/menendez-austin-afghan-testimony-511794>)

about the safety of American citizens and others who were left behind and whether a realistic timeline exists for their evacuation.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the United States and 98 other countries' recent statement stating they remain committed to evacuating those left behind in Afghanistan based on "assurances" they've received from the Taliban, it's simply unacceptable to place the lives of American citizens in the hands of the Taliban - a terrorist organization responsible for the deaths of thousands of U.S. servicemembers.<sup>8</sup>

The United States commitment to the American citizens remaining in Afghanistan, LPRs, SIV holders, and our Afghan allies must continue unabated until all who seek to flee the Taliban and ISIS-K are evacuated. The safety of American citizens and those left behind is paramount, and I have serious concerns about the United States capability to evacuate these individuals as quickly and as safely as possible. Accordingly, I request a briefing from the State Department on its strategy to protect American citizens, LPRs, SIV holders, and our Afghan allies from the Taliban and ISIS-K, and its strategy and timeline for evacuating these individuals. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Pappas". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Chris Pappas  
Member of Congress

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<sup>7</sup> Jakes, Lara. "In a final blow of the 20-year war, U.S. envoys close their embassy and exit Kabul." *New York Times*, August 30, 2021 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/30/us/politics/blinken-us-evacuation-taliban-afghanistan.html>)

<sup>8</sup> Jakes, Lara. "98 Countries Pledge to Accept Afghans After U.S. Military Departs" *New York Times*, August 29, 2021 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/29/us/politics/afghanistan-refugees.html>)